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For the National Era.

THE GREAT STONE FACE.

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

One afternoon, when the sun was going down, a mother and her little boy sat at the door of their cottage, talking about the Great Stone Face. They had but to lift their eyes, and there it was, plainly to be seen, though miles away, with the sunshine brightening all its features.

And what was the Great Stone Face? Embosomed amongst a family of lofty mountains, there was a valley so spacious that it contained many thousand inhabitants. Some of these good people dwelt in log huts, with the black forest all around them, on the steep and difficult hillsides. Others had their homes in comfortable granite houses, or level surfaces of the valley. Others, again, were congregated into populous villages, where some wild, highland rivulet, tumbling down from its birthplace in the upper mountain region, had been caught and tamed by human cunning, and compelled to turn the machinery of cotton factories. The inhabitants of this valley, in short, were numerous, and of many modes of life. But all of them, grown people and children, had a kind of familiarity with the Great Stone Face, although some possessed the gift of distinguishing this grand natural phenomenon more perfectly than many of their neighbors.

The Great Stone Face, then, was a work of Nature in her mood of majestic playfulness, formed on the perpendicular side of a mountain by some immense rocks, which had been thrown together in such a position, and when viewed at a proper distance, precisely to resemble the features of the human countenance. It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan, had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, a hundred feet in height, the nose, with its long bridge, and the vast lips, which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the valley to the other. True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage, and could discern only a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks, piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retreating his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen, and the farther he withdrew from them, the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear; until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the Great Stone Face seemed positively to alive.

It was a happy lot for children to grow up to manhood or womanhood with the Great Stone Face before their eyes, for all the features were noble, and the expression was at once grand and sweet, as if it were the glow of a vast, warm heart, that embraced all mankind in its affections, and had room for more. It was an education only to look at it. According to the belief of many people, the valley owed much of its fertility to this benign aspect that was continually beaming over it, illuminating the clouds, and infusing its tenderness into the sunshine.

As we began with saying, a mother and her little boy sat at their cottage door, gazing at the Great Stone Face, and talking about it. The child's name was Ernest.

"Mother," said he, while the Titanic visage smiled on him, "I wish that it could speak, for it looks so very kindly that its voice must needs be pleasant. If I were to see a man with such a face, I should love him dearly."

"If an old prophecy should come to pass," answered his mother, "we may see a man, some time or other, with exactly such a face as that."

"What prophecy do you mean, dear mother?" eagerly inquired Ernest. "Pray tell me all about it!"

So his mother told him a story that her own mother had told to her, when she herself was younger than little Ernest; a story, not of things that were past, but of what was yet to come; a story, nevertheless, so very old, that even the Indians, who formerly inhabited this valley, had heard it from their forefathers, to whom, as they affirmed, it had been murmured by the mountain streams, and whispered by the wind among the tree-tops. The purport was, that, at some future day, a child should be born hereabouts, who was destined to become the greatest and noblest personage of his time, and whose countenance, in manhood, should bear an exact resemblance to the Great Stone Face. Not a few old-fashioned people, and young ones likewise, in the ardor of their hopes, still cherished an enduring faith in this old prophecy. But others—who had seen more of the world, had watched and waited till they were weary, and had beheld no man with such a face, nor any man that proved to be much greater or nobler than his neighbors—concluded it to be nothing but an idle tale. At all events, the great man of the prophecy had not yet appeared.

"Oh, mother, dear mother," cried Ernest, clapping his hands above his head, "I do hope that I shall live to see him!"

His mother was an affectionate and thoughtful woman, and felt that it was wisest not to discourage the generous hopes of her little boy. So she only said to him, "Perhaps you may!"

And Ernest never forgot the story that his mother told him. It was always in his mind whenever he looked upon the Great Stone Face. He spent his childhood in the log-cottage where he was born, and was dutiful to his mother, and helpful to her in many things, assisting her much with his little hands, and more with his loving heart. In this manner, from a happy yet often pensive child, he grew up to be a mild, quiet, unobtrusive boy, and was beloved by all who knew him, for his intelligence brightening his aspect than is seen in many boys who have been taught at famous schools. Yet Ernest had no teacher, save only that the Great Stone Face became one to him. When the toll of the day was over, he would gaze at it for hours, until he began to imagine that those vast features recognised him, and gave him a smile of kindness and encouragement, responsive to his own look of veneration. We must not take upon us to affirm that this was a mistake, although the Face may have looked no more kindly at Ernest than at all the world besides. But the secret was that the boy's tender and confiding simplicity discerned what other people could not see; and thus the love, which was meant for all, became his peculiar portion.

About this time, there went a rumor throughout the valley, that the great man, foretold from ages long ago, who was to bear a resemblance to the Great Stone Face, had appeared at last. It seems that, many years before, a young man had migrated from the valley and settled at a distant seaport, where, after getting together a little money, he had set up as a shopkeeper. His name—but I could never learn whether it was his real one, or a nickname that had grown out of his habits and success in life—was Gathald. Being shrewd and active, and endowed by Providence with that inscrutable faculty which develops itself in what the world calls luck, he became an exceedingly rich merchant, and owner of a whole fleet of bulky-bottomed ships. All the countries of the globe appeared to join hands for the mere purpose of adding heap after heap to the mountain of his accumulation of this man's wealth. The old regions of the North, almost lost in the gloom and shadow of the Arctic Circle, sent him their tribute in the shape of furs; but Africa sifted him her golden sands of her rivers, and gathered up the ivory tusks of her great elephants out of the forests, the East came bringing him the rich shawls, and silks, and teas, and the effluence of diamonds, and the gleaming purity of large pearls. The ocean, not to be behindhand with the earth, yielded up her mighty whales, that Gathald might sell their oil, and make a profit on it. He was the original commodity that it might, it was gold within his grasp. It might be

said of him, as of Moses in the Bible, that whatever he touched with his finger immediately glittered, and grew yellow, and was changed at once into sterling silver, or into gold, and his days, after, into piles of coin. And when Mr. Gathald had become so very rich that it would have taken him a hundred years only to count his wealth, he took thought of his native valley, and resolved to go back to his dear old home, where he was born. With this purpose in view, he sent a skilled architect to build him such a palace as should be fit for a man of his vast wealth.

As I have said above, it had already been turned out in the valley that Mr. Gathald had returned out to be the prophetic personage, so long and vainly looked for, and that his visage was the person and admirable similitude of the Great Stone Face. People were no more content to believe that this must needs be the fact, when they beheld the splendid edifice that rose, as if by enchantment, on the site of his father's old weathered homestead, for the exterior was not so dazzlingly white that it seemed as though the whole structure might melt away in the sunshine, like those humbler ones which Mr. Gathald, in his young play-days, before his fingers were soiled with the taint of money, had been accustomed to build of mud. It had a richly ornamented portico, supported by tall pillars, beneath which was a lofty door, studded with silver knobs, and made of a kind of variegated wood, and from the floor to the ceiling of each stately apartment, were composed, respectively, of one enormous pane of glass, so transparently pure that it was to be seen finer than the air itself. The interior of the palace, however, was permitted to see the interior of this palace; but it was reported, and with good semblance of truth, to be far more gorgeous than the outside, inasmuch that, whatever was iron or brass in other houses, was silver or gold in this; and Mr. Gathald's bed-chamber, especially, made such a glittering appearance that no ordinary man would have been able to close his eyes there. But, on the other hand, Mr. Gathald was not so fond of wealth, that perhaps he could not have closed his eyes, unless where the gleam of it was certain to find its way beneath his eyelids.

In due time, the mansion was finished, next came the march of the wondrous creature; then, a whole troop of black and white servants, the harbingers of Mr. Gathald, who, in his own majestic person, was expected to arrive at sunset. Our friend Ernest, meantime, and the other children of the valley, who were gathered about the new mansion, were all of them, in their own way, looking forward to the coming of the great man, the man of the prophecy, after so many ages of delay, was at length to be made manifest to his native valley. He knew, as we have said, that there were a thousand ways in which Mr. Gathald, with his vast wealth, might transform himself into an angel of beneficence, and assume a control over human affairs as wide and benign as the smile of the Great Stone Face. He knew, too, that he could not have closed his eyes, unless where the gleam of it was certain to find its way beneath his eyelids.

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